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Japanese Autumnal Equinox Day

In Japan, September 23 is a national holiday known as *shumbun no hi* (Autumnal Equinox Day), when day and night are roughly equal. The seven days surrounding the holiday are known as *aki no higan* (Autumnal Equinoctial Week), in contrast to the *haru no higan* (Vernal Equinoctial Week) around March 23. Also known as *ato no higan* (Latter Equinoctial Week), the holiday is regarded as a time to pay respects to one's ancestors and visit their graves. People visit graveyards and offer flowers and incense in both the city and countryside alike. Even in modern times, when some hope to have their ashes scattered, the tradition of attaining inner peace by respecting one's ancestors and holding them dear continues, and all Japanese, irrespective of age or sex, are the same in terms of the peaceful, refreshing feeling they have after visiting their ancestral graves. **JS**

